

Message Text

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ORIGIN AF-08

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

ACDA-07 /062 R

DRAFTED BY AF/E:RSBARRETT:CJ

APPROVED BY AF:AMB. SEELYE

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P 172150Z MAY 76

FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA PRIORITY

INFO AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM PRIORITY

AMCONSUL ASMARA PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 121042

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR ET

SUBJECT: CALL BY ETHIOPIAN CHARGE: PRESS REPORTS OF
IMPENDING ETHIOPIAN OFFENSIVE IN ERITREA

1. ETHIOPIAN CHARGE MEKBIB CALLED ON ASST SEC STATE SEELYE ON MAY 17 AT HIS INITIATIVE BUT NOT UNDER INSTRUCTION. HE WANTED TO DISCUSS AND SEEK CLARIFICATION ON RECENT ARTICLES IN US PRESS ABOUT PMG PREPARATIONS FOR AN OFFENSIVE IN ERITREA AND REPORTED INSTRUCTIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION FOR US EMBASSY TO DISCUSS SUBJECT WITH PMG. HE WISHED TO "GET WORD FROM US RATHER THAN PRESS".

2. SEELYE REVIEWED BACKGROUND OF ARTICLES IN NY TIMES AND POST, INFORMING MEKBIB THAT BINDER ARTICLE RESULTED PRIMARILY FROM INFORMATION SUPPLIED TO NY TIMES FROM ADDIS ABABA WHICH HE HAD CHECKED OUT ON A BACKGROUND BASIS WITH USG AGENCIES. IT DID NOT REPRESENT A DELIBERATE USG EFFORT TO GET THIS SUBJECT INTO THE NEWS, BUT WE HAD NOT
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FELT WE COULD DENY AWARENESS OF EVENTS WHICH WERE COMMON

KNOWLEDGE IN ETHIOPIA.

3. ON WASHINGTON POST MAY 14 ITEM, SEELYE SAID THIS
COULD ONLY HAVE REPRESENTED POST WRITERS' OWN DEDUCTION
FROM BRIEFING WHICH STRICTLY FOLLOWED EXISTING GUIDANCE

(STATE 116687) SPECIFICALLY ENJOINING AGAINST ANY COMMENT
ON OUR INTENTIONS ON THIS SUBJECT AT THIS TIME. AT MAY
14 BRIEFING, THE PRESS SPOKESMAN HAD MERELY NOTED THAT
WE HAD ALWAYS FAVORED A NEGOTIATED SOLUTION.

4. SEELYE TOLD MEKBIB THAT WE HAVE NOT INSTRUCTED THE
US EMBASSY AT ADDIS TO DISCUSS THIS SUBJECT WITH THE
PMG. WHAT HAPPENS IN ERITREA IS AN INTERNAL ETHIOPIAN
MATTER. HOWEVER, MEKBIB MUST BE AWARE THAT ANY PMG
MILITARY INITIATIVE IN ERITREA THAT COULD REFLECT UN-
FAVORABLY ON THE PMG COULD, IN VIEW OF CONGRESSIONAL
APPROVAL REQUIRED FOR MILITARY ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS, HAVE
AN IMPACT ON OUR ABILITY TO HELP ETHIOPIA IN THE SECURITY
ASSISTANCE FIELD. FYI: REPLY TO ADDIS 5595 AND 5777
STILL UNDER CONSIDERATION. END FYI.

5. WHEN ASKED FOR HIS APPRECIATION OF ERITREAN SITUATION
MEKBIB SAID THAT HE HAD BEEN BRIEFED ON PMG POSITION AT
RECENT MEETING OF ETHIOPIAN DIPLOMATS HELD IN EUROPE.
HE GAVE STANDARD ETHIOPIAN PRESENTATION BLAMING DIVISIONS
AMONG ERITREAN INSURGENTS AND THEIR PRECONDITION OF
INDEPENDENCE FOR THE FAILURE OF NEGOTIATIONS TO FOLLOW
FROM NIMEIRI INITIATIVE, WHICH PMG FULLY SUPPORTED. HE
PICTURED PLF AS CHRISTIAN LED AND RELATIVELY CONCILIATORY
COMPARED TO "100 PERCENT MUSLIM ELF". HE ALSO SAID PMG
HAD BEEN ACTIVE IN THE OAU AND WITH CERTAIN AFRICAN AND
ARAB GOVERNMENTS TO TRY AND BRING NEGOTIATIONS ABOUT AND
A HALT TO THE FLOW OF WEAPONS TO INSURGENTS FROM CERTAIN
COUNTRIES.

6. MEKBIB CITED TEFERI BANTE SPEECH OF MAY 16 AS EXAMPLE
OF PMG WILLINGNESS TO BE CONCILIATORY BUT STATED THAT
ETHIOPIA COULD NOT AGREE TO SEPARATION OF ERITREA WHICH
HAD BEEN ETHIOPIAN PROVINCE "SINCE TIME IMMEMORIAL". HE
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SAID USG MUST NOT FORGET THAT ARMS WERE BEING SUPPLIED TO
ELF/PLF BY NATIONS HOSTILE TO BOTH ETHIOPIA AND US.
FURTHERMORE PMG FIGHT AGAINST DISMEMBERMENT OF ETHIOPIA
WAS A CONTRIBUTION TO STABILITY THROUGHOUT AFRICA AS
ERITREAN SUCCESS WOULD BE FOLLOWED BY SECESSIONIST MOVE-
MENTS THROUGHOUT THE CONTINENT. ONLY SOMALIA DID NOT
RESPECT THE TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY OF OAU COUNTRIES OR
RECOGNIZE THE BOUNDARIES LEFT BY THE COLONIAL PERIOD.

7. MEKBIB SAID HE WAS SATISFIED BY OUR EXPLANATIONS OF
LAST WEEK'S PRESS FLURRY AND PRESENT STATUS OF POSSIBLE
US APPROACH TO PMG ON ERITREAN SITUATION. WE PROVIDED
HIM WITH COPIES OF PRESS GUIDANCE PREPARED MAY 12 AND 14
(STATE 116687 AND 119336). KISSINGER

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